

Spain's Real reliance means nothing to Luis Enrique



Spain's Marco Asensio (L) celebrates his team's second goal in the 6-0 romp of Croatia in the UEFA Nations League at Estadio Martínez Valero in Elche, Spain, on September 11, 2018.

Luis Enrique insisted it did not matter in the slightest that six of Spain's starting lineup against Croatia were Real Madrid players.

La Roja destroyed the World Cup finalist in the Nations League clash in Elche on Tuesday, breezing to a 6-0 triumph, the biggest defeat in their opponents' history, AS reported.

Madrid stars Dani Carvajal, Sergio Ramos, Nacho Fernandez, Dani Ceballos, Isco and Marco Asensio all started the match, while Sergio Busquets was the one Barcelona player in the first 11.

The selection raised some eyebrows given Luis Enrique's three years as Barca boss between 2014 and 2017, but the 48-year-old has no interest in which clubs his chosen players represent.

"I did not know or care," he told a news conference when asked about the number of Madrid players in his lineup. "They belong to the Spanish national team, nothing more. I see only the shirt of the national team."

"It doesn't make sense to compare national teams and clubs. We have our idea of playing football and today, everything was amazing. We started with some doubts, but then we were brilliant, with incredible goals."

"What I liked most about these 10 days was the attitude of the players. From what I've seen, regardless of the result, I'm delighted."

Croatia missed early chances through Ivan Santini and Ivan Perisic, but Spain never relinquished control once Saul Niguez broke the deadlock 24 minutes in.

Asensio doubled the lead and then forced an own goal from goalkeeper Lovre Kalinic, before the winger set up Rodrigo Moreno, Ramos and Isco in the second half.

The variety in Spain's attacking play pleased Luis Enrique the most after the somewhat shaky opening.

"We were facing Croatia, a team which presses very well, and it was difficult for us to get the ball out. Everything changed as of the 20th minute," he said.

"We had fast, direct football, with good work between the lines. Ramos made the changes of direction, Asensio was tremendous with his goals and passes, we had the success and speed of Rodrigo, Busi distributing the ball... I've nothing to object about. I liked almost everything."

Hands up!

Croatia boss Zlatko Dalic admitted his side 'gave up' against Spain, which 'are much more vertical and dangerous' under Luis Enrique.

"The best thing we can do is congratulate Spain," said the World Cup runner-up after the match.

"It's not easy for us to accept conceding so many goals, but we have to draw some

conclusions. We can't sit down and cry, we have to keep working.

"After their first and second goals went in, we started losing grip and Spain gained momentum, finding it easier to get into our box."

"We didn't have the solutions. While we played as a team everything worked, but as soon as we stopped playing like that, it was over."

"After their first goal, we weren't as focused as we were before it. We tried to do things too quickly, we started to abandon our game and you can't do that against Spain, which was playing at home and controlled the ball. We simply didn't pose any danger."

"After the second goal, we gave up and it was all over. I wasn't able to motivate anyone during half-time."

"I tried to get a different second half going, but we went back to our game from the first half and it didn't work."

"We have to learn from a defeat like this because we've seen what happens when we play as a team and what happens when we don't."

"Spain still had good percentages in possession of the ball, but now they're much more vertical and dangerous. That was without a doubt tonight."

"I'm not going to make hasty decisions after this game, but Nations League is an official competition and you have to see who can play in it and who can't."

Record world champion Vogel ready for new life after crash

World and Olympic champion Kristina Vogel, who was paralyzed following a training crash in June, said on Wednesday she was ready to tackle her new life but has had no contact with the Dutch rider involved in the collision.

In a news conference at the Berlin hospital where she has been treated, Vogel, a record 11-time world champion, said she had accepted the fact that she would not walk again moments after the accident at the Cottbus Sport Centre Velodrome, Reuters reported.

"I said 'breathe, breathe, breathe' and then I checked," she said of the collision in which part-time police officer Vogel suffered serious spinal and chest injuries.

"Then I saw where I lay, how I was. When my shoes were off I knew that this was it with the walking. I realized quickly I would not walk again."

She underwent back and chest surgery and earlier this month announced she had been paralyzed.

Vogel said neither the cyclist who had crashed with her, nor the Dutch cycling

federation had been in touch with her.

"I have had no contact with the rider," a smiling Vogel, sitting next to her doctors, said. "Neither the Dutch federation nor the rider have been in contact."

Vogel added she was looking forward



Germany's Olympic and world sprint cycling champion Kristina Vogel (L) and her doctors address a news conference at the Unfallkrankenhaus Berlin hospital in Berlin, Germany, on September 12, 2018.

to an independent life and to find a role in her sport.

"Tears will not help. It is what it is," she said.

"I am ready to take on this challenge and make the best of it. I want to get back into life, not depend on a lot of help. I must use this strength I had in competitions for my life. Asking 'why me' does not bring you any further."

"For the first time I have time to take decisions for me, to be free and learn step by step what I need to. I want to do things for cycling. I want to give something back."

The 27-year-old had previously suffered serious injuries when she was hit by a minibus in 2009 while riding near her home, being placed in a medically-induced coma. However, she battled back to win Olympic gold in the track cycling team sprint at the London Games in 2012.

At the Rio Olympics four years later she won gold in the individual sprint despite her saddle breaking at 60kph in the closing meters of the final.

Vogel has won 11 world titles — a record she shares with Australian great Anna Meares. She also has three European golds.

Presidential play

President of Liberia George Weah, a former World Footballer of the Year, made a surprise return to football in Monrovia on Tuesday, playing for 79 minutes in a 2-1 friendly loss to Nigeria.

Iran's Rahman wins Asian para powerlifting gold

Sports Desk

Iran's Siamand Rahman stole the show on the final day of the 2018 Asia-Oceania Open Powerlifting Championships in Japan and won the +107kg gold.

competitions.

Rahman then surprisingly failed in his attempt at 285kg.

However, the world's strongest Paralympian said he is not worried. His goal was to win the title and achieve qualification for Tokyo

man said.

"It is hard to describe my feelings right now, but I can say that I will surprise everyone at the Asian Para Games and, later on, at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games."

Rahman has already vowed to break his own 310kg world record at Indonesia 2018, in October.

Two-time Paralympics gold medalist Rahman was followed by his compatriot Mansour Pour-Mirzaei in the standings who grabbed the silver with the best lift of 245kg.

Iraq's Faris al-Aqili settled for the bronze with 240kg.

Rahman's medal took the country's gold tally to two as Seyyed Hamed Solhipour had won the men's 97kg gold on Tuesday.

Solhipour lifted 231kg on his third attempt and edged the Emirati Mohammed Khamis Khalaf — who raised 230kg — in a closely-contested tie for the gold. China's Panpan Yan took the bronze with 216kg.

Some 200 athletes from 35 countries participated in the competitions in the Japanese city of Kitakyushu on September 8-12.



RAPHAEL DIAS/GETTY IMAGES

The 30-year-old Iranian overcame the 280kg weight in his second attempt to seal a first-spot finish in the

2020, and he did.

"I will put my gold medal together with my others in my room," Rah-

England feel-good factor dented by familiar failings

England returned from Russia filled with hope after a World Cup that promised a brighter future with a run to the semifinals for the first time in 28 years.

However, that feel-good factor has given way to a reality check in the first two matches since the World Cup fever died down, AFP reported.

Southgate accepted the fault had been tactical as well as technical, and made the changes necessary for a better second-half display that yielded victory thanks to Marcus Rashford's winner.

However, the England boss was also quick to highlight another familiar problem as justification for

"We've asked a lot physically of the players through that tournament. Our players were out on their feet by the end."

"To get a team together for that third-fourth playoff was tough. Then they've had this minimal preseason period."

Spain's 6-0 thrashing of Croatia already means England's chances



ANDREW BOYERS/REUTERS

England players look on as they prepare to take a free-kick during a 1-0 victory over Switzerland in King Power Stadium in Leicester, the UK, on September 11, 2018.

Defeat to Spain in the Nations League opener on Saturday — following losses to Croatia in Russia in the last four and to Belgium in the third-place playoff — meant England had lost three consecutive games for the first time in 30 years.

A run of four straight defeats for the first time ever was avoided with a scrappy 1-0 friendly win over Switzerland on Tuesday. But it was a performance that caused more reason for concern than optimism.

England manager Gareth Southgate bemoaned his side's inability to keep the ball under pressure against Spain's midfield maestros in a repeat of the World Cup heartache when Croatia's Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic took control of their semifinal.

But while Spain and Croatia boast some of the world's best midfielders, Southgate had to watch his much-changed side chase the ball for long spells of the first half against the less-heralded Swiss.

a lackluster first 45 minutes.

Lack of opportunities

Midfielders Fabian Delph and Ruben Loftus-Cheek were making their first starts of the season, having failed to get a chance at Manchester City or Chelsea so far.

"They needed the game. It was important we gave them that opportunity," said Southgate, in the unfamiliar role of an international manager trying to get his players match fit.

Southgate has repeatedly warned of the worrying lack of opportunities handed to English players in the ever more cosmopolitan Premier League.

And he pointed to the stresses and strains of a World Cup summer on a shallow pool of talent as a reason for an understandable early season hangover.

"I knew this week was going to be tough mentally to switch back from World Cup to these games," he said.

of reaching the semifinals of the Nations League look slim.

The long-term goal, though, is for England to compete to win Euro 2020, with the semifinals and final to be played on home soil at Wembley.

Southgate is under no illusions about the task ahead, particularly when it comes to beating sides such as Spain, the world champion France and Belgium.

"For the teams that got to the last four, Roberto (Martinez, Belgium manager) has the Harlem Globetrotters and France have quite a lot of depth as well," he said in reaction to Spain's humiliation of the World Cup finalists.

"For ourselves and Croatia we are a smaller pool of players."

England's ability to cope with the best teams in Europe faces another stiff test next month in a daunting double-header away at Croatia and Spain in the Nations League.

After a summer during which he was lavished with praise, Southgate is being forced to wrestle with familiar flaws.